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ON PAGE 1A

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Reagan faults past CIA cuts in bomb blast

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MILWAUKEE — Campaigning in the Midwest, President Reagan yesterday laid blame for last week's bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon on the "near destruction" of American spying capacity before he came to office.

He told students at Bowling Green State University in Ohio that "we're feeling the effects today of the near destruction of our intelligence capability... before we came here — the effort somehow to say, well, spying is dishonest and let's get rid of our intelligence agents...."

"We're trying to rebuild our intelligence to where you'll find out and know in advance what the target might be and be prepared for it."

Asked whether the president was referring to cutbacks in intelligence staffing under President Jimmy Carter, a White House spokesman said, "I'll let you draw your own conclusions, but you wouldn't be wrong."

Mr. Reagan appeared to be pointing the finger of blame at the Carter administration, during which Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, cut hundreds of clandestine operatives from the agency's payroll in favor of increased technical spying.

Democrats in Congress reacted angrily yesterday, arguing that the president should himself accept the responsibility for the security failure.

Mr. Reagan spoke to more than 3,000 cheering students at the university before flying to Canton, Ohio, to inspect a new high-technology steel mill being built in a region where many thousands of jobs have been lost in the steel industry. Later, he came to Milwaukee to address an ethnic Oktoberfest gathering before returning to Washington.

At what was billed as a foreign policy forum but organized into a high-decibel pep rally, Mr. Reagan told the Ohio students that the United States must "be patient when provoked," but "we must be equally clear that past a certain point our adversaries push us at their peril."

"Uncle Sam is a friendly old man, but he has a spine of steel," he declared.

The president's response in a question-and-answer session with students was the first time he had implied that any part of the fault for the latest embassy bombing lay with the Democrats. Last fall after the second of the three major anti-U.S. bombing incidents in Lebanon, he said that he accepted responsibility.

There was a dispute then over whether U.S. forces had received intelligence warnings about possible bombing of the Marine barracks at the Beirut airport.

Mr. Reagan concluded his remarks on the latest Lebanon incident by saying the alternative to taking such risks was to close down American installations abroad and "give the terrorists a victory we're not going to give them."

In Washington, Senator Patrick J. Leahy (D, Vt.), a member of the Intelligence Committee, said, "How dare he try to escape his responsibilities? If he does not immediately retract his statement, we should rise up and say, 'For shame, Mr. President, for shame. You shame your office,'" according to the Associated Press.

Similar anger was expressed by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D, N.Y.), who is vice chairman of the committee, and Senate Minority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D, W. Va.).

Demanding an apology, Mr. Moynihan said President Carter had asked for and received increases in the CIA budget each year. The New York Democrat also released a letter to him from CIA Director William J. Casey, a Reagan appointee, in which Mr. Casey said that "the increase in personnel and budgetary strength of the agency began in 1979," under President Carter.

Mr. Byrd asked of President Reagan, "Where's he been for the last four years?" The senator said, "It's one thing to be able to stage-manage walking away from these disasters, but it's another thing to try and leave the impression that they didn't even happen on your watch."

At the Timken Company's new Faircrest computerized steel mill at Canton, Mr. Reagan spoke against "those who call for protectionism and quotas, which are short-sighted and temporary at best."

"A blunderbuss approach of quotas and trade barriers" to protect U.S. industry is "a giant step back into the misery of a failed past," he said.

Many of the construction workers who crowded in front of the president at the steel mill wore Mondale-Ferraro stickers on their hard hats and were restrained in their applause for Mr. Reagan's remarks. But all responded when he declared that "given the tools and equipment, we Americans can out-produce, out-sell and out-compete the pants off anybody in the world."

At Bowling Green, the several thousand students who jammed a basketball field house were at the center of another controversy over whether Reagan rally organizers have unfairly kept Democratic supporters away.

Outside the hall, several hundred anti-Reagan spectators were kept back behind snow fences, and could neither be seen nor heard by those cheering inside. They chanted "Give peace a chance," and some complained that tickets to the "Presidential Forum on World Affairs" had been distributed by local Republican officials, through the fraternity and sorority houses.